

Interview with  
Esperanza Gonzalez  
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I used to work in Miller's Surplus Store in Pomona and the nationals would always come in and there from the San Antonio Camp. They used to walk all the way and back. I guess it's about 4 miles each way; I don't know why they didn't go to a store that was closer to the camp; I guess I do know after all, it's because Mr. Miller always has 2 or 3 girls working for him who are able to speak Spanish. The nationals always seem to buy the same things. They buy khaki trousers; and work jackets and those funny hats; and underwear; and leather shoes, loafers. They were always very polite to me when I waited on them, extremely polite. Another time I was working ~~xxx~~ at Newberry's in the Pomona Valley Shopping Center. I was working upstairs and one of the salesladies from downstairs came up and said, "Come down and give me a hand, there is a man who wants to buy something, but I can't understand a word he is saying." So, I went downstairs and there was a Mexican-National with his buddy, and he wanted to buy some yard goods for his wife in Meixico and send them to her; so he told me how tall she was and how big around she was. I told him how much yardage he would need and he bought it. I guess he sent it back to his wife in Mexico, and he seemed quite satisfied. But, it was the funniest sight to see this fellow and his friend standing there in that store. They were both obviously scared to death. They were standing real close to each, to give each other moral support, I guess and they were almost actually trembling.

Another time I was in Long's Drugstore and the fellow in the prescription department came up to me and said, "would you please do a little bit of interpreting for me? There is a fellow over here who just keeps pointing to his stomach, but I can't understand him and he can't understand me. I guess he has a stomachache, but I cannot give him anything until I know a little more about it." So I went over and there was this



national with two of his friends, who were kind of supporting him. He told me that he had been sick at the stomach for a week and wasn't able to keep a thing down. He had walked all the way from the camp, because apparently the camp doctor hadn't been able to help him at all. So I told this to the druggist and the druggist sold him some pills and he went off apparently satisfied. I hope they made him well.

I really feel sorry for these guys, they seem so lonely. When you go by the camp on Sundays, you will see them just sitting around. They never seem to go to the movies or to church or anything else in town. I think one of the reasons is that they feel they don't have any clothes that are nice enough. We used to seel nice shirts and things like that at Miller's, but the nationals never bought that sort of thing. I guess they don't make enough money. Anyway, they have very little contact with people in town. I guess it is because they don't have the opportunity to make such contats. So here they are, in a strange country where they don't know anybody and can't talk to anybody and have nothing to do.

It is not that the local Mexican have anything against the nationals. So far as I know, the men in these camps faven't taken the jobs away from any of the local people. It's the guys who come up on visas who do that. There is a fellow who lives right across from me who came from Mexico about a year ago. He is the 'high and mighty' type. He thinks he is real good just because he came from Mexico; already he has gotten the job as janitor in the local school; although I know one fellow who has been here 35 years who would love to have had that job but has never been able to get it. It is the nationals like that, that I really get mad at. Then Mrs. Torres has her own ideas on the subject. She has three daughters all of marriagable age, and she is scared to deathe that the nationals are going to make off with them. I guess it stems back to the World War 2 days, when they had braceros in here. And when the local boys were off



overseas fighting and there were many cases of nationals marrying local girls; sometimes they would even marry the girls who had husbands overseas. This probably happened to somebody in Mrs. Torres' own family, but, anyway she really hates their guts--if you will pardon the expression. I don't think very many people feel the same way she does, because the nationals are so well-behaved. I don't see how anybody could have anything against them.

Another reason I feel sorry for them is that they are getting gyped. Frequently I hear fellows talking about how easy it is to sell things to them that they can't get rid of any other way. One guy I know had an old car and it was nothing but a heap of junk. I heard him saying one day, "I will take the car down to the national camp and I am sure I can sell it down there for 50 bucks." Well, I guess he did it all right, because the next day, I know he didn't have the car any longer. This sort of thing goes on all the time.

We very rarely see a national here in Claremont. For example, they never come to the church here or to the church-social events here. The Father here doesn't have anything to do with them, I guess it is because they are in a different parish.

We used to have a lot of wetbacks right in Claremont. They used to hire a lot of them in the lemon packing house, where I have worked for ~~the~~ 15 years. They used to sleep under trees and in people's backyards, and just about any place. One time my husband and I saw a couple of little boys. They were about 12 or 13 years old, just walking along; and we stopped them and asked them where they came from. It seems that their parents who were very poor, had sent them up here to see if they could make some money. They hadn't eaten for 4 or 5 days. They were dressed in rags and they didn't have any shoes. Well, my husband and I took them home with us and gave them some good food and some of my husband's clothes and we gave them some money to buy shoes. Then my mother and brother



were going up to the San Joaquin Valley soon after that to pick grapes and we asked these boys if they would like to go along and they said, "Why not?", they hadn't been able to find any other work. So my mother and brother took them up there for tree weeks and at the end of that time when the grape picking was over, my mother packed them a big lunch and bought them tickets back to where they came from. They had \$200 that they had been able to earn during the three weeks.